Taking Stock of Nature

Participatory Biodiversity Assessment for Policy, Planning and Practice

In a world of increasing demands for biodiversity information, participatory biodiversity assessment and monitoring is becoming more significant. Whilst other books have focused on methods, or links to conservation or development, this book is written particularly for policy-makers and planners. Introductory chapters analyse the challenges of the approach, the global legislation context, and the significance of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. Specially commissioned case studies provide evidence from 17 countries, by 50 authors with expertise in both biological and social sciences. Ranging from community conservation projects in developing countries, to amateur birdwatching in the UK, they describe the context, objectives, stakeholders and processes, and reflect on the success of outcomes. Rather than advocating any particular approach, the book takes a constructively critical look at the motives, experiences and outcomes of such approaches, with cross-cutting lessons to inform planning and interpretation of future participatory projects and their contribution to policy objectives.

ANNA LAWRENCE has been working for nearly 20 years in participatory conservation and social forestry research. Following degrees from Cambridge and Oxford Universities, her early career in South America and Asia inspired a focus on interaction between local and scientific knowledge, and linking research to policy and practice. At the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, she established and led the Human Ecology research group for seven years. After working in more than 20 countries she has recently moved to focus on issues closer to home, as Head of Social and Economic Research in the British Government’s Forestry Commission.
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Although the chapters in this book are new, the idea of this book began with an internet conference in 2002. For months the UK forest policy advisory group had been discussing monitoring and reporting, in its international and high level forms. Although members were polite about my advocacy of participatory monitoring, we realized we needed evidence. So we organized an internet conference, and 300 people signed up from 55 countries. This was with the great encouragement and patience of Willemine Brinkman, at that time the coordinator of the European Tropical Forest Research Network, who offered the ETFRN website and support. The conference would never have happened without her, nor Jeannette van Rijsoort who edited the website and the proceedings. Bianca Ambrose-Oji, who co-authored the conference introduction with me, as always shared ideas creatively and generously. The papers, summaries and discussions are available at http://www.etfrn.org/etfrn/workshop/biodiversity/index.html. Acknowledgement also goes to the people who thought this was worth supporting financially. For months I had an email folder labelled ‘begging letters’. Those from whom I begged successfully included John Palmer (of the Forest Research Programme, UK Department for International Development), and Tropenbos International. The internet conference also would not have taken shape without the insight of colleagues who agreed to write summaries of each day, and each theme.

That of course was not the end of it. The internet conference made us realise the important of linking experience to outcomes, and of presenting this in a way that helped policy people to decide if that was what they wanted and needed. The cases presented here are specially commissioned for this book. My biggest thanks here are to the authors, who engaged with some rather proactive editing. Dominic Lewis, Rachel Eley and Alison Evans at Cambridge University Press have also been patient and encouraging. The Environmental Change Institute (particularly the Director, Diana Liverman) took a flexible approach...
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